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COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Thirteenth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE FIRST PART (PUBLIC)*
OF THE 320th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 25 September 1996, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mrs. BALEMBAOGO

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* No summary record was prepared for the second part (closed) of the meeting.

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENTS RELEVANT TO THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE (agenda item 5)

1. The CHAIRPERSON reported to members of the Committee that she had attended the seventh annual Meeting of chairpersons and members of international human rights treaty bodies held at Geneva from 6 to 20 September 1996. They would receive copies of the records of that meeting before the close of the current session. The Meeting had adopted several recommendations, special attention being given to a number of recommendations drafted the previous year, in particular the recommendation to transfer the secretariat of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women from New York to Geneva in order to facilitate collaboration among the treaty bodies, a transfer already suggested by the Committee on the Rights of the Child. The High Commissioner for Human Rights had informed the chairpersons of the approaches he had made to the World Bank to coordinate monitoring of the implementation of international human rights instruments. She recalled that the Committee had always welcomed the attendance of representatives of the World Bank at its meetings, as a means of ensuring that due account was taken of the Convention in structural adjustment and cooperation programmes. A further meeting between the experts of the Centre for Human Rights and the World Bank was to take place in November or December 1996 to determine measures to improve cooperation in all fields. She suggested that such an approach should be extended to all the Bretton Woods institutions.

2. On the subject of education on human rights, the chairpersons of the treaty bodies had appealed to all specialized agencies and UNDP to pay more attention to human rights in their programmes of work. They had recommended that UNDP should prepare a plan of action for promotion of human rights and expressed the wish that the Interparliamentary Union might be invited to attend the next Meeting so as to strengthen collaboration between the various treaty bodies and the regional mechanisms concerned with human rights. The chairpersons had been informed of the plans for restructuring the Centre for Human Rights; Committee members would be informed subsequently of the measures announced during that Meeting.

3. Mrs. SARDENBERG said she had attended the Habitat II Conference, held at Istanbul from 3 to 14 June 1996. She urged members of the Committee to read in its entirety the document adopted by the Conference on urbanization and its social effects on the urban and rural environment. The Conference had adopted two new procedures since its preceding session; one of the Conference committees had invited not only mayors and local authorities but also representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to speak on agenda items. In addition, all Governments had been invited to report on their progress on habitat issues, in order to share their experience with other countries. She stressed the importance of the documents adopted by the Conference, namely the Declaration of Heads of State and Government and the Habitat Agenda, which called for a global plan of action at all levels to ensure implementation of the right to proper housing. It was imperative that the Committee on the Rights of the Child should join in the implementation and monitoring of the programme. In that connection, she suggested that a compilation should be prepared of the recommendations made by members of the

Committee on the subject. Lastly, the Conference had concluded that all Governments should unite their efforts and collaborate with NGOs and the private sector to see that the right to proper housing was implemented.

4. The Committee had been invited to participate as an observer in the meeting of NGOs on street children held at Amsterdam from 21 to 23 June 1996. She had given an account of the work of the Committee and reaffirmed the Committee's reliance on the participation of NGOs in its work to help it form a clear picture of the situation prevailing in each country whose report it was considering.

5. The preparatory meeting for the Congress on the application of the Convention, which was to have been held at Jerusalem on 2 July 1996, had ultimately not taken place as a result of disagreement between Palestinians and Israelis on some of the arrangements for that meeting. However, she had been able to meet the members of the Palestinian delegation at Jerusalem and to discuss the agenda with those responsible for the meeting. The meeting had eventually been held on 3 September at Geneva. She had been unable to attend but had received the final document adopted. The representatives of the Swiss Government, which had organized the meeting, would meet the members of the Committee for an exchange of views on the Congress.

6. The CHAIRPERSON said that the Congress would be held at Geneva in late 1996.

7. She had attended the mini-summit for African children held at Yaoundé (Cameroon) in July 1996 by UNICEF, with the support of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), as a prelude to the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of OAU. The mini-summit had been conducted by children who were victims of war, orphans or disabled or who had been enlisted into armies or militias. The children had had the opportunity to talk to the Ethiopian Prime Minister and current President of OAU, the Presidents of Mali and Eritrea, senior officials of UNICEF and Mr. Fall, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights. The mini-summit had led to the adoption of a number of resolutions and recommendations. The leading figures attending had expressed their concern and deep emotion at the evidence provided by the children, who had explicitly held heads of State responsible for wars and their repercussions on the most vulnerable sectors of the population. They had submitted a report on their work at the opening of the Meeting of Heads of State and Government of OAU, during which a resolution, based on the conclusions reached by the children, and urging heads of State and Government to take the Convention into consideration, had been adopted unanimously.

8. Mrs. KARP said she had, with three other members of the Committee, attended the World Congress on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, Stockholm, which had been widely reported in the media, particularly in the wake of the paedophile revelations in Belgium a few days previously. Unfortunately, the Convention had not figured prominently in the deliberations. In the discussion group attended by leading religious representatives from various countries, for example, nobody had been asked to present the principles of the Convention. She had therefore taken the floor in the group, but had to admit that much still remained to be done to promote and disseminate the Convention.

9. Mr. KOLOSOV suggested that in any discussions with delegations of countries where children were victims of war or sexually exploited, the Committee should call attention to the recommendations made by children at the mini-summit. He asked whether any mention had been made at the Stockholm World Congress of a second optional protocol to the Convention.

10. Miss MASON endorsed the comments made by Mrs. Karp with respect to the Stockholm World Congress. She herself, having taken part in the discussion group on prevention and psychosocial rehabilitation, regretted that there had been no real exchange of views owing to the proliferation of workshops.

11. She had also chaired a meeting of countries of the Americas which had led to a proposal to ask the Inter-American Children's Institute to undertake monitoring activities. The meeting had not given the results hoped for; she did not feel that Governments had shown sufficient political will. They were much more inclined to discuss matters of concern to the Committee when submitting their periodic reports to it.

12. Mr. HAMMARBERG said that the poor organization of the Stockholm World Congress had largely resulted from its high media profile, which had, however, been useful in creating awareness in a number of countries. Over 120 Governments had made declarations, which were to be published shortly in a report. Even though the programme of action adopted by consensus was not binding, it would nevertheless permit States to be asked what follow-up they had made. Interested bodies could also re-examine their programmes of work in the light of the programme of action.

13. He was disappointed that the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, who was very short of resources, had barely received a mention despite the presence of the special Rapporteur. However, a resolution specifically concerned with the rights of the child was to be considered by the United Nations General Assembly, as well as a resolution, recommended by the Stockholm World Congress, on adoption of a second optional protocol to the Convention.

14. Mrs. KARP said that she had taken part in the discussion group on prostitution and had contributed to adoption of a resolution seeking to extend to the age of 18 the protection afforded to the child. Since no decision had been taken on how binding the resolution should be, it would be the Committee's task to monitor it. Similarly, with regard to pornography in the media and the use of computers and the Internet for pornographic purposes, a subject dealt with by a workshop, the Committee ought perhaps to ask States what measures they were taking in that field.

15. Mr. HAMMARBERG said that he had found no real absence of political will; the problem was rather the difficulty of preventing the dissemination not only of pornographic material, but also of publicity for paedophile rings. It was up to the Committee to ensure that Governments took appropriate measures and to keep the matter in mind in preparing guidelines.

16. Mrs. KARP said that she also felt that it was not absence of political will but rather a confusion of outlook that had put forward arguments on

freedom of expression even in the workshop on pornography. There was ignorance of the fact that the Convention set standards making it mandatory for States to protect children against prostitution.

17. Mr. KOLOSOV, referring to the difficulty of controlling the dissemination of publicity on child pornography, said that reference to the freedom of information enshrined in international law was not relevant since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights themselves set limits to that freedom. He considered that political will was lacking in the international community.

18. The CHAIRPERSON recalled the need to approach Governments and partners to improve awareness of the Convention and promote it as a reference document.

19. Mr. HAMMARBERG again stressed the technical difficulties Governments experienced in monitoring information that circulated anonymously on computer networks.

20. Mrs. KARP said she had also attended a workshop organized by UNICEF in which representatives of indigenous peoples and children had taken part. She had been surprised to find, once again, how little was known about the Convention. She had tried to persuade the participants that the principles enshrined in the Convention, which sought to protect the dignity of the child, were common to all cultures.

21. The CHAIRPERSON said that not only was there little awareness of human rights instruments, sometimes even in the government services responsible for initiating the procedures of signature and ratification, but in addition some provisions were incorrectly interpreted, which made it even more difficult to secure ratification of such instruments.

22. Mr. HAMMARBERG informed the Committee that the report on children in armed conflicts had been completed and would be considered on 11 November 1996 by the United Nations General Assembly, which would debate the proposals prompted by the Committee, such as setting a minimum age of 18 years for enlistment in the armed forces.

The public part of the meeting rose at 4.25 p.m.